

Message Text

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73

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 IO-12 ADP-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-11 INR-10

LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 AID-20 PA-03 PRS-01

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R 101650 Z APR 73

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7177

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

USMISSION GENEVA

UNCLAS BRUSSELS 1968

E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: ELAB, BE

SUBJECT: LABOR- TROUBLE AT CATERPILLAR

REF: BRUSSELS A-87

1. PRIME MINISTER LEBURTON WILL MEET APRIL 10 WITH OFFICIALS OF CATERPILLAR AND TRADE UNION LEADERS TO TRY TO RESOLVE AND EIGHTEEN- DAY- OLD STRIKE OF CATERPILLAR'S 2000 BLUE- COLLAR WORKERS WHICH THREATENS TO ENGULF WALLONIAN METAL INDUSTRIES IN GENERAL STRIKE. STRIKE BEGAN MARCH 22 AS ROUTINE ACTION OVER FAILURE TO AGREE ON NEW CONTRACT IN WHICH CATERPILLAR WORKERS, NOW HIGHEST PAID IN AREA, WANTED TO MAINTAIN WAGE DIFFERENTIALS RELATIVE TO WORKERS IN OTHER FIRMS AND MANAGEMENT WANTED TO BEGIN TO REDUCE THEM.

2. SITUATION CHANGED RADICALLY MARCH 28 WHEN SEVERAL WORKERS, INCLUDING SHOP STEWARD, WERE TERMINATED FOR DAMAGE TO COMPANY AND INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY. SUCH ACTS ARE PROHIBITED UNDER BELGIAN INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AGREEMENTS BUT WORKERS CLAIMED SHOP STEWARD WAS PROTECTED BY AGREEMENT THAT PROHIBITS DISCIPLINARY

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ACTION FOR ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AS UNION REPRESENTATIVES. CONCILIATION EFFORTS FAILED AND FURTHER VIOLENCE, DIRECTED IN PART TOWARD WHITE- COLLAR WORKERS WHO IGNORED LEADERS' CALLS TO JOIN STRIKE (OVER THOUSAND SIGNED " RIGHT TO WORK" APPEAL), REQUIRED INTERVENTION OF POLICE APRIL 9. WORKERS ARE TRYING TO SEAL OFF PLANT, AND SOCIALIST AND CHRISTIAN TRADE UNIONS HAVE SCHEDULED WAVE OF ONE- HOUR SYMPATHY STRIKES APRIL 10. THEY HAVE ALSO THREATENED TO SEEK SUPPORT OF WORKERS AT CATERPILLAR AT GRENOBLE, FRANCE, AND TO LAUNCH STRIKE TO FINISH AGAINST ALL CHARLEROI- AREA METAL PLANTS.

3. COMMENT: CATERPILLAR PROBLEM COMES IN PERIOD OF SERIOUS ECONOMIC AND UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEMS IN WALLONIA AND AMID TRADE UNION DEMANDS THAT GOVERNMENT ALLEVIATE SITUATION. FACT THAT PROBLEMS LIKE THAT AT CATERPILLAR ADD FURTHER TO LARGELY UNDE-SERVED REPUTATION OF WALLONIAN WORKERS FOR EXCESSIVE MILITANCY IS SERIOUS EMBARRASSMENT FOR REGIONAL POLITICAL AND LABOR LEADERS, WHO ALSO WANT MORE PRIVATE INVESTMENT, AND MILITATES FOR SOLUTION SHORT OF GENERAL STRIKE THAT UNION LEADERS FEAR MIGHT FAIL.

STRAUSZ- HUPE

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*** Current Classification *** UNCLASSIFIED

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